

PROSPECT,

OR

View of the Moral World,

BY ELIHU PALMER.

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Comments on the sacred writings of the Jews and Christians: Genesis, chapter 19th.

THE RIOT, THE MIRACULOUS SHOWER, A WOMAN TURNED
INTO A PILLAR OF SALT.

ALMOST every thing may be found in this bible but truth and consistency, and these are ingredients that are very scarce. Extravagance, violations of the laws of nature, distortions of the character of God, and discordant historical anecdotes, frequently appear in the regular process of our enquiries. This jumble of stuff is of no manner of use to any living creature, either as to morals, science or religion; this chapter begins with an account of two itinerant gentlemen, first called angels, then lords, afterwards men; they go to the house of one Lot, who immediately sets about the business of preparing for them a feast: They had not been there long however, before a rabble rout of men gather round Lot's door, and demand a sight of the travellers; a riot is raised and a scuffle ensues, which terminates on the part of Lot, in the exposure of his two daughters to the insults of a seditious mob, he offers to surrender them up without reserve, and for the special purpose of screening from public violence the two travellers that had entered his house; now who were these two men, what was their business and their character, that the whole city should be set in an uproar about them? angels or celestial beings they were not, for if they had been they would have wanted neither bread nor meat. It is probable therefore, that they were some itinerant speculators, who had in some shape or other troubled the public repose, and set the populace in a rage against them. As to their smiting the mob with blindness, and predicting in the name of the Lord the destruction of the place, they are

not the only juggling impostors that have played off the same game upon an ignorant and credulous world. Every age and country has produced a race of travelling prophets and hypocrites, who go about for purposes of alarm, speaking in the name of heaven, and threatening vengeance whenever it suits their caprice or gratifies their resentment. This story further affirms that Lot with his family made their escape out of the city, and then commences that most wonderful and miraculous shower, consisting of fire and brimstone, and which God is said to have sent down in his wrath, for the purpose of destroying the creatures of his power and his goodness. A rain of fire and brimstone! who can form any conception of it? is it consistent with the laws of nature, or does it comport in any shape whatever with the character of God? no, it is one of the fictions of red hot fanaticism, as hot as fire and brimstone, and destitute of all the features of rationality and of justice: but what had distress Lot done, that she must be salted up in such a wonderful manner! She cast back, as was natural, a wishful eye towards the place of her former residence, and for this it was said she was turned into a pillow of salt. Ye reverend and learned divines, you who have studied in your literary institutions the principles of natural philosophy, ye *literati* of the christian world, tell us if you please, inform us if you can, by what strange and marvellous process it is that a human body can become a solid mass of salt. "*But it was a miracle, and all things are possible with God.*" The position is false; all things are not possible with God. He cannot annihilate his own existence; he cannot diffuse light throughout the whole universe, and cause universal darkness to prevail at the same time; he cannot turn a woman into a pillar of salt, because it is inconsistent with the laws of existence, and in its own nature impossible. But further, this miraculous action ascribed to God is immoral. Of what consequence was it which way Lot's wife looked, whether she looked backwards or forward, to the right or to the left, was a thing of no account, and the circumstance ought not to be marked with criminality. This chapter closes with a story of disgusting indelicacy, relative to Lot and his two daughters; it forbids all comment, it stands barricaded behind a breastwork of detestable indecency, falsehood and impossibility, and there let it stand to all eternity! it is a dishonor to God, and unworthy of man to believe. Ye pious believers in christianity, can ye dignify such indelicate stories, with the name of divine revelation? If ye can your taste must be very corrupt, and your ideas of God very imperfect and erroneous.

Of the Old and New Testament.

ARCHBISHOP Tillotson says, "the difference between the style of the old and new Testament is so very remarkable, that one of the greatest sects in the primitive times did, upon this very ground, found their heresy of two gods; the one evil, fierce, and cruel, whom they called the God of the old Testament; the other good, kind and merciful, whom they called the God of the new Testament; so great a difference is there between the representations which are made of God in the books of the Jewish and the Christian religion, as to give, at least, some colour and pretence to an imagination of two Gods." Thus far Tillotson.

But the case was, that as the church had picked out several passages from the old Testament, which she most absurdly and falsely calls prophesies of Jesus Christ, (whereas there is no prophesy of any such person, as any one may see by examining the passages and the cases to which they apply,) she was under the necessity of keeping up the credit of the old Testament, because, if that fell the other would soon follow, and the christian system of faith would soon be at an end. As a book of morals there are several parts of the new Testament that are good, but they are no other than what had been preached in the Eastern world several hundred years before Christ was born. Confucius, the Chinese philosopher, who lived five hundred years before the time of Christ, says, *acknowledge thy benefits by the return of benefits, but never revenge injuries.*

The clergy in Popish countries were cunning enough to know, that if the old Testament was made public, the fallacy of the new, with respect to Christ, would be detected, and they prohibited the use of it, and always took it away wherever they found it. The deists, on the contrary, always encouraged the reading it, that people might see and judge for themselves, that a book so full of contradictions and wickedness, could not be the word of God, and that we dishonor God by ascribing it to him.

A true Deist.



COMMUNICATION.

Of Cain and Abel.

THE story of Cain and Abel is told in the fourth chapter of Genesis. Cain was the elder brother, and Abel the younger, and Cain killed Abel. The Egyptian story of Typhon and Osiris, and the Jewish story of Genesis of Cain and Abel, have the appearance of being the same story differently told, and that it came originally from Egypt.

In the Egyptian story, Typhon and Osiris are brothers; Typhon is the elder, and Osiris the younger, and Typhon kills Osiris. The story is an allegory on darkness and light; Typhon the elder brother is darkness, because darkness was supposed to be more ancient than light: Osiris is the good light, who rules during the summer months, and brings forth the fruits of the earth and is the favourite, as Abel is said to have been, for which Typhon hates him; and when the winter comes and cold and darkness overspread the earth, Typhon is represented as having killed Osiris out of malice, as Cain is said to have killed Abel.

The two stories are alike in their circumstances, and their event, and are probably but the same story; what corroborates this opinion, is, that the fifth chapter of Genesis, historically contradicts the reality of the story of Cain and Abel in the fourth chapter; for though the name of *Seth* a son of Adam, is mentioned in the fourth chapter, he is spoken of in the fifth chapter, as if he was the first born of Adam. The chapter begins thus:—

“ This is the book of the *generations of Adam*. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God created he him.—Male and female created he them, and blessed them, and called their name Adam in the day when they were created,—And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years and begat a son, in his own likeness and after his own image, and called his name *Seth*. ” The rest of the chapter goes on with the genealogy.

Any body reading this chapter can't suppose there were any sons born before *Seth*. The chapter begins with what is called the *creation of Adam*, and calls itself the book of the *generations of Adam*, yet no mention is made of such persons as Cain and Abel; one thing, however, is evident on the face of these two chapters, which is, that the same person is not the writer of both; the most blundering historian could not have committed himself in such a manner.

Though I look on every thing in the first ten chapters of Genesis to be fiction, yet fiction historically told should be

consistent, whereas these two chapters are not. The Cain and Abel of Genesis, appears to be no other than the ancient Egyptian story of Typhon and Osiris, the darkness and the light, which answered very well as an allegory without being believed as a fact.

MIRACLES.

SUPPOSE for instance, that a miracle-monger and a dexterous juggler both perform alike things to appearance, though the one be real, and the other delusory, while the evidence of the facts seems to be equal on both sides; who but those that are skilled in the one, or the other, can distinguish the one from the other? How many juggling tricks of Heathen and Popish priests are recorded in history for miracles; and other impositions for the wonderful works of their Gods and Saints, all for the honour and glory of religion, and sometimes to subdue men's minds to virtue: Are they capable of the same evidence as other historical facts? How easy is it for a pious soul to be induced to believe notorious frauds, that have the face of piety, and seem done to promote it; are the reports of strange things, which they are not in a condition to make a true judgment of, equal to those of other historical facts? Tho' all historical facts recorded are not true, yet there is a vast difference between the probable and improbable. If a man tells me he came over Westminster-bridge to day, it may be true, though a little objection may lie against it, because it is not quite finished, which may occasion some further questions, in order to be better satisfied of the truth of it; but if he tells me he took a running jump, at low tide, and leapt it over just by the bridge, I know it to be impossible, therefore a lie, and enquire no more about it. Is this latter story as credible as the former? no sure, though I may know the relater, and know him to be an honest man, that is not used to lye; and tho' it be attested by many others. I ought to have extraordinary evidence, to induce me to believe extraordinary things, that are supernatural, which cannot be so credible as ordinary things which are natural. In cases where there is difficulty and danger in trusting to ones own senses and judgment, there is much more in trusting to the senses and judgment of others, and confiding in their report; therefore such reports are not as capable of the same evidence, nor as fit to be believed as other historical Facts. Since we are warned against the impositions of false

miracles, we have certainly a right to enquire what are true, and whether any? And therefore we should be most careful of trusting those that are most capable of deceiving. Not only the histories of miracles should be cautiously received, but the performer of them; for as a man possessed of uncontrollable power is not a proper person to be trusted with my property, neither is such a person proper to be the director of my judgment, who can by his power play upon my weakness, by his art impose upon my understanding, and by his tricks deceive my senses; a miracle worker has it in his power to do all these things. Men are often deceived without a wonder, but wonders are very capable of deceiving; and therefore a wonder-working man may be a powerful deceiver; he that can alter things, or the nature of them in any case, can also alter the appearances of things, by either of which the rules of truth and certainty are destroyed; because either the observer is deceived, or there is no tract left for his judgment; for what confounds the order of nature must confound man's judgment. When a point is to be proved by miracle, we give up reason to authority, and by the same means, if it can be done, it may raise any sort of deity, or establish any doctrine. Suppose but the power and possibility of deception in a miraculous operator, which I think may be reasonably supposed, and then there is not the same reason to believe a miracle, as in cases, where no possibility of such power is; for the appearances of things are more easily changed, than the reality of them? Therefore miracles are not capable of the same evidence, nor have an equal right to be believed as other historical facts, let the evidence be reputed ever so credible. Both a miracle-worker and the reporters of miracles, are of all mankind the least fit to put confidence in, and the most to be guarded against; because we ought always to be on our guard against the appearance and possibility of deception; therefore the miracle-worker, the work, and reporter have not an equal right to be believed, nor are as credible as other common facts, by those that would neither be imposed upon, nor impose on others. Common sense teaches us, that stories probable and improbable are not on the same foundation, nor have or deserve equal credit. Besides, an easy belief upon hearsay, a surprise, incurious enquiry, the fondness of novelty, and of telling a surprising tale, loving that others should believe as we do; add to these downright fibbing for pleasure or profit, render the stories of miracles, not so credible as other historical facts. It is certain, that nothing has been more pernicious and deadly to the reason, freedom and happiness of mankind, than men's giving up their understandings to the faith of won-

derful stories. It has introduced and established spiritual tyranny in teachers, and slavery in believers.

English writer.

INEVITABLE evils are ever best supported,—it is suspense, it is hope that constitutes the food of misery ; certainty is always endured because known to be past amendment, and felt to give defiance to struggling.

WHO nought believe, but what they see
We such free thinkers call ;
But how can they free thinkers be,
Who never think at all ?

GOOD heavens ! why should so much be heaped on a few whom profusion cannot satisfy, while a bare competency is withheld from multitudes, whom penury cannot render discontented.

COMPLAISANCE is undoubtedly one of those qualities, which every man should carry into society, but at the same time he should know its proper bounds ; for really it is pushing attention and politeness to a very great length, to sacrifice four and twenty hours together to the whims of other people.

PAINFUL are the apprehensions of deserved punishment, and excruciating the torments of remorse ; with horror they haunt our retirement, with fearful anxiety they interrupt our rejoicings :—Happy he whom no racking conscience accuses ; the sense of misfortune may be softened, but the consciousness of guilt and the pangs of remorse are eternal.—

THE CONFERENCE.

“ I am come,” said his Reverence to Spintext, to borrow
“ Good brother your pulpit to preach in to-morrow ; ”
“ For what purpose ! ”—“ Pshaw that your own reason
must teach,
“ If I ask for your pulpit, my aim is to preach ! ”

" Excuse me," said Spinetext, " I've vow'd while I live
 " To no man on earth that permission to give,"
 " Your reasons, dear Sir!"—“ Why, in truth I have two,
 " One of which in all conscience, I think should serve you,
 " First,—if you preach better than I do you see,
 " My flock will in future think nothing of me;
 " And if you preach worse sir, I speak without sneering,
 " Depend on my word sir, you are not worth hearing.

CERTAINTY.

HAD you, in Copernicus's time, asked all the world, did the sun rise, did the sun set, to-day? they would one and all have answered, that is a certainty; we are fully certain of it: thus they were certain, and yet mistaken.—Witchcraft, divinations, and possessions, were for a long time universally accounted the most certain things in the world.—What numberless crowds have seen all these fine things, and have been certain of them! but at present such certainty begins to lose its credit.—A mathematical demonstration is a very different certainty from these: they were only probabilities, which, on being searched into, are found errors; but mathematical certainty is immutable and eternal.—I exist, I think, I feel pain; is all this as certain as geometrical truth? Yes. And why? because these truths are proved by the same principle, that a thing cannot at the same time be and not be.—I cannot at one and the same time exist and not exist, feel and not feel.—A triangle cannot have and not have a hundred and eighty degrees, the sum of two right angles.—Thus the physical certainty of my existence and my sensation, and mathematical certainty, are of a like validity, though differing in kind.—But this is by no means applicable to the certainty founded on appearances, or the unanimous relations of men. *Voltaire.*

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